



# Weight management

Some people avoid dairy foods, believing they cause weight gain. However, research shows that milk, cheese, and yoghurt protect against weight gain and obesity, and can even aid weight reduction in a weight-loss diet.

## Eating dairy foods is not linked with weight gain

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) reviewed evidence from 2003 to 2009 on the link between weight and dairy consumption when developing the Australian Dietary Guidelines. The review found no link between eating these foods and weight gain or risk of obesity in adults.<sup>1</sup>

Studies published since the NHMRC's review also show a neutral effect of these dairy foods on weight. Two recent meta-analyses collated results from numerous randomised controlled trials from the 1960s to 2012. Both found that eating at least three daily servings of dairy, like milk, cheese, and yoghurt, was not linked to weight gain compared to diets with lower dairy intake. Lower intake was defined as less than two to one serving per day.<sup>2, 3</sup>

## Eating dairy foods can help with weight loss

In kilojoule-controlled weight loss studies, two meta-analyses showed including at least three daily serves of milk, cheese and yoghurt resulted in:

- Greater weight loss
- Increased muscle mass
- Reduced fat mass
- Reduced waist circumference.

These results were seen when compared to diets lacking adequate daily servings of dairy.

People can feel confident that milk, cheese and yoghurt in a healthy, balanced diet and exercise program will not cause weight gain. In fact, dairy can lead to better results.

## Explaining the results

There are four reasons that might explain the beneficial effects of dairy foods within weight-loss diets. It is likely to be a combination of the following four effects:

- Dairy calcium may reduce the amount of dietary fat absorbed by the body.<sup>4</sup>
- Insufficient calcium intake promotes regulatory changes that can reduce fat mobilisation and oxidation. This means people tend to burn less fat when they have a low calcium intake.<sup>5</sup>
- Some studies suggest dairy foods may help to reduce feelings of hunger and the desire to eat.<sup>6</sup>
- Dairy foods are a source of protein which has a well-known positive role in weight loss.

## If people are already overweight, should they really increase their dairy intake?

To achieve and maintain a healthy weight, the 2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines encourage people to choose nutritious foods from the five food groups. This includes milk, cheese and yoghurt. Another recommendation is to limit discretionary foods (or 'junk' foods). These foods are often high in kilojoules and low in nutrients.

Discretionary foods contribute excessively to the energy intake of Australians. In the 2011–2012 Australian Health Survey it was estimated that discretionary foods accounted for 35 per cent of total energy intake.<sup>7</sup> Eating less of these foods allows nutritious foods, like dairy, to be accommodated within appropriate energy intakes.

Weight and body fat loss can be enhanced by including three to four daily serves of milk, cheese and yoghurt. This change must be in the context of a healthy, balanced diet as recommended in the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

An Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) will be able to help with a personalised weight management plan.

## References

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